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# MARIANNE GIBSON QUILT



Mariane Gibson Quilt.jpg



Marianne Gibson Quilt

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## Location

WANGARATTA EXHIBITIONS GALLERY, 56 OVENS STREET WANGARATTA, WANGARATTA RURAL CITY

## Municipality

WANGARATTA RURAL CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2297

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO13

## VHR Registration

February 9, 2012

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

What is significant?

The Marianne Gibson crazy quilt was made between 1890 and 1896 in Wangaratta by Marianne Gibson, the wife of local business man Alexander McCalla Gibson.

The Marianne Gibson crazy quilt consists of nine square blocks each made of 20-30 irregularly shaped pieces of silk fabric giving a total of approximately 200-300 pieces of fabric. The blocks have been machine stitched to each other with narrow, gathered maroon silk ribbon borders and the whole quilt has a wide border of maroon silk velvet with zigzag edges. The backing is shot, honey coloured silk. Linen *Guipure* lace edging has been attached behind the velvet. The filling is made from raw silk instead of the more usual cotton or wool. This filling silk was likely to have been produced locally by the Victorian Ladies Sericulture Company Limited, a women's venture which operated between c.1872-1892 to promote sericulture as a new industry and as a means of creating income for disadvantaged women.

Most of the fabric pieces of the quilt are hand embroidered with designs incorporating Oriental, botanical, childhood, fairyland and sentimental themes derived from the Aesthetic movement and from more conservative art and design movements. The quilt also includes personal references to Marianne's two dead children. The quilt demonstrates the central place of flowers as a decorative and symbolic theme during the Victorian era where they were used extensively in both sewing and gardening. The Australian images on the quilt such as Sturt's Desert pea flowers reflect the nationalism of the time. The high quality hand embroidery, choice of colours and textiles used are typical of the period.

How is it significant?

The Marianne Gibson quilt is of aesthetic and historical significance to the state of Victoria.

Why is it significant?

The Marianne Gibson crazy quilt has aesthetic significance as an outstanding example of the craft of crazy quilting. It is a rare unfaded example of a 19th century quilt and the largest known crazy quilt in Victoria. As a sophisticated artwork in its own right, it is a significant example of a woman's creative self expression in an era where this was restricted to textile arts such as embroidery and quilting. The quilt is a rare surviving example of the colours used in Victorian interior furnishings and demonstrates the rapid spread of the bright colours of the synthetic dyes invented during the Industrial Revolution.

The Marianne Gibson quilt is of historical significance as an important part of the Australian quilting tradition which started in the 1810s and continues today. It is an outstanding example of the highly popular crazy quilting obsession that gripped many leisured women in the United States and Australia during the 1880s and 1890s. This quilt's Australian iconography, personal references and memorialising demonstrates traditions which continue today in works like The Aids Memorial Quilt.

## Permit Exemptions

<span class="c1">General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object.</span> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and Heritage Victoria shall be notified as soon as possible.</span> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan endorsed by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan.</span> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this determination prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.</span> <span class="c1">General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.</span>

## Theme

5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce 8. Building community life 9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates	1890,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered object,
Other Names	MARIANNE QUILT,
Hermes Number	149911
Property Number	

## History

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

Quilts

Patchwork and quilting have been made since earliest times with patchwork quilts becoming popular at the start of the eighteenth century in Britain and the USA. Quilts were first documented in Australia in the 1810s. There are two main types of quilt -functional and decorative. Functional quilts include wagga quilts, bush quilts and patchwork. These were usually made for warmth and used in bedrooms. Some of these such as patchwork quilts were only made for decoration as were crazy quilts. Memorial crazy quilts were made to commemorate wars, deaths and other events. There is considerable cross over between all the quilt types.

Crazy quilts

Crazy quilts were made for display in living areas where they were draped over furniture or used to cover tables. The format of crazy quilts with their irregularly shaped pieces was inspired by the crazed glazes on Japanese ceramics and by Japanese design in general and began in the USA. Crazy quilts were also known as Japanese or Kaleidoscope patchwork. This was part of a widespread fashion for Japanese art objects and furniture starting in the 1870s. Instructions for making crazy quilts were found in publications such as *Weldon's Practical Patchwork* or *Dictionary of Needlework*. Crazy quilts were the first type of free-form, non-geometric quilts made by women and the precursor of the modern art quilt movement.

Fabrics

The colours, materials and aesthetic of crazy quilts matched and complimented the other furnishings used in Victorian living rooms. The maroon silk velvet, silk fabrics, elaborate embroidery, hand-made lace and bright synthetic colours used in this quilt were very popular in furnishings of the era. Maroon velvet was a very fashionable and popular fabric for furniture.

In the 1890s the European silk industry was declining and while some silk was grown in Europe much was also grown in Asia. The silk was processed by hand however the fabric would have been spun, dyed and woven in Europe using industrial processes. Small amounts of artificial silk (known as Art Silk, rayon or viscose) began to be manufactured in the 1890s. It is possible that some were used in the Gibson quilt but this is unlikely as it was not really produced commercially until 1905.

Embroidery

The free-form satin stitch embroidery or "silk shading" used on crazy quilts was developed by the Royal School of Needlework in Kensington who promoted the technique as a way of "painting" pictures on fabric. This approach was inspired by the revival of medieval English crewelwork by William Morris and gave the maker more scope for creativity.

Dyes

The change from natural to synthetic dyes started in 1856 with the commercial production of aniline purple; continuing with azo yellow and orange dyes in 1863 and synthetic alizarin maroon in 1870. The last of the natural dyes, indigo became obsolete by the start of WWI with the commercialisation of synthetic indigo (patented in 1890). Synthetic dyes destroyed the large traditional industries in natural dyestuffs such as logwood, cochineal and indigo and had a considerable economic impact in those areas where traditional dyes had been produced, especially in India. Meanwhile synthetic dyes caused pollution in the areas where they were made and used. While purists in the Aesthetic movement deplored the unnatural brightness of synthetic dyes, fabrics dyed with these colours were adopted enthusiastically by the general community.

Lace edging

*Filet* or *Guipure* Lace (also called *Lacis* or *Guipure d'Art*) is made by embroidering a design onto a square-meshed net background. The net may have been made by shuttle or needle. Furniture lace as used on this quilt is heavier and coarser than lace made for clothing. Lace was very commonly used in furnishing in Victorian living areas and was used on mantelpieces and furniture as antimacassars. This type of lace was made in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal since mediaeval times for decorating religious houses and revived in Europe in the c.19.

Sericulture

Mrs Bladen Neill and the Victorian Ladies Sericulture Company Ltd was a cooperative which set up a sericulture industry in Northern Victoria and nearby areas in NSW from ca. 1870-1892. Only women could be office bearers of the organisation. This industry was designed by women to

create a new industry and to provide an income to farmers' wives and poor women. Many acres of mulberry trees were planted at Mt Alexander, Barnawartha, Corowa and around Wangaratta amongst other areas. Mulberry trees still grow at places such as Bontherambo and Chateau Tahbilk. The silk processing was done in shearing sheds as the timing coincided with non-shearing times. Eventually the industry failed due to the invention of artificial silk, competition from Asia and a resurgence of the European industry where a solution to silk worm diseases had finally been found. The Victorian Ladies Sericultural Company was officially wound up and its assets disposed of in 1892

**Design**

The 1890s was a time of enormous change in the world, and quilting and interior decoration were not immune to this. Before the 1890s women's artistic endeavours were very limited and the designs used on textiles such as quilts were conservative - generally standard geometric and floral patterns. While flowers continued to be very popular they were used more freely on crazy quilts. Kate Greenaway defined the meanings of flowers in her book *Language of flowers* (1884) and these meanings were used on crazy quilts to convey messages. This approach to using flowers on quilts mirrored changes in gardening which led to far less formal designs. Flowers and their symbolism were used extensively by Victorian era women in sewing and gardening for the creation of "beauty and goodness" in their houses. Other household items of the period were also decorated with Australian plants e.g. Doulton Burslem's 'Wattle' pattern ceramics (c1890s-1900s).

**Social history**

Sewing machines became popular in the 1850s and 1860s and revolutionised women's work and leisure activities. Hand-sewing became more valued as a result. Crazy quilts were an opportunity to display the maker's womanly achievements in the areas of hand sewing, home making, floral decoration and interior design.

Jennifer Isaacs has noted that the enormous contribution of women's domestic arts to Australia's social and creative history has been largely ignored. Most of these crafts focused on the family, home and garden and as a result were not widely visible. This has led to a lack of attention to craft made in the home as opposed to paintings made in studios. Many quilts especially crazy quilts are actually works of art with little functional purpose.

Crazy quilting was a popularised response by women to the Aesthetic movement. The Aesthetic as well as more conservative art and design movements of the time were inspired by the Orient (middle and far East), flowers, childhood, fairyland and sentimental themes - all of which appear in Marianne Gibson's quilt. Crazy quilts used the same velvet, rich silk fabrics and lace which were used in furnishings of the era. The bright colours were also typical of interior design of the era although rarely seen today due to fading.

**HISTORY OF OBJECT**

Marianne Gibson (1837, Armagh, Ireland - 1911, Wangaratta) came to Australia in 1862. She made the quilt from approximately 1891 to 1896 in her residence above her husband Alexander McCalla Gibson's general store in Reid St. Wangaratta. Alexander Gibson was a prominent and wealthy business man in Wangaratta. Marianne was also well known in the town and had a long involvement with the Wangaratta Women's Benevolent Society. She had 7 children of whom 3 sons and 2 daughters survived to adulthood. When asked how much the quilt had cost Alexander said "A pair of eyes."

As well as selling food, wine and hardware (including many rakes) Alexander Gibson's store also sold furnishing fabrics. There was a dress fabric shop next door to the general store. The pieces of silk used for the quilt may have come from Marianne's household; scraps from both shops, family in the USA and/or from commercially available packages of silk scraps.

The maroon silk velvet, maroon ribbon, silk embroidery threads and hand made lace would have been purchased. The Kate Greenaway and other embroidery transfers would also have been purchased. The transfers were probably made by a company called Briggs & Co who invented the iron-on transfer method. Marianne Gibson had relatives in the USA which may have influenced her to make a crazy quilt as well as to embroider crossed US and Australian flags. A sewing machine was included in Alexander Gibson's assets at probate.

The silk filling in the quilt is very unusual as cotton was almost always used to fill quilts, and many crazy quilts had no filling. This silk was almost definitely locally produced from a pioneering women's social initiative. Marianne may have bought the silk when the Victorian Ladies Sericultural Company was operating; when it was wound up in 1892 or she could have been a supporter of the initiative through her involvement with the Wangaratta Ladies Benevolent Society.

The quilt was not used and kept in a suitcase wrapped in sheets, only being shown to honoured guests. It was inherited by Marianne's daughters Edith and Clara in 1911. They did not use it and gave it to their mother's housekeeper Miss Alma Gard in 1934 who also did not use it and kept it in the same suitcase. After Miss Gard's death in 1985 the quilt was given to the Wangaratta Historical Society by her family. Marianne Gibson's quilt is a very valued part of the collection of the Wangaratta Historical Society. The Wangaratta Historical Society has not displayed the quilt due to concerns about its safety and it is kept in a box at the Wangaratta Exhibitions Gallery as the Historical Society does not have enough space.

## Plaque Citation

This crazy quilt was made by a Wangaratta woman from 1891-6. Its embroidered Australian, floral, fairyland and Oriental designs on imported silk fabrics; locally produced silk filling and European linen lace are particularly notable.

## Assessment Against Criteria

a. Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history

The designs on the Marianne Gibson crazy quilt are of historical significance because they demonstrate Australian nationalism of the 1890s; the migration of design ideas from the USA to rural Victoria and the popular nostalgia for pre-Industrial Revolution hand manufacture as promoted by Ruskin, Morris and others. Luxury, flowers, the Orient and fairyland were fashionable themes at the time and their use in this quilt illustrates how fashions spread to Victoria.

Marianne Gibson's quilt is an important part of the Australian quilting tradition which started in the 1810s and continues today. It is an outstanding example of the highly popular crazy quilting obsession that gripped many leisured women in the US and Australia during the 1880s and 1890s. This quilt also includes personal references and memorialising (as did other crazy quilts); demonstrating a tradition which continues today e.g. The Aids Memorial Quilt.

b. Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

The Marianne Gibson crazy quilt is of historical significance for its use of unprocessed, raw silk filling instead of the far more usual cotton. This silk almost certainly from a local silk industry located at Gooramadda near Rutherglen from ca. 1877 to 1891. The silk business was owned and operated by the Victorian Ladies Sericulture Company Ltd (VLSC), a business which was run solely by women and set up to create income for disadvantaged women in the area. VLSC operated at Mt Alexander (VHR1348) from 1873-1878 and then moved to Gooramadda. All VLSC's assets and their land at Gooramadda were sold at sheriff's auction in Rutherglen in early 1892.

c. Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.

The Marianne Gibson crazy quilt is of historical significance as the largest, un-faded crazy quilt, with the finest embroidery and textural effects that is publicly accessible in Victoria. It is a sophisticated artwork in its own right and an outstanding example of a woman's creative self expression in an era where this was restricted to textile arts such as embroidery and quilting

e. Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

The Marianne Gibson crazy quilt is of aesthetic significance as a rare surviving un-faded example of the bright colours and rich textures of Victorian homes during the 1890s. The maroon velvet, furnishing lace and embroidery of this quilt demonstrate the furnishings and aesthetic of the Victorian era.

The Marianne Gibson crazy quilt is of aesthetic significance for its use of Oriental (Middle and Far East), botanical, childhood, fairyland and sentimental themes from the Aesthetic or "Artistic" movement as well as those from more conservative art and design movements of the time and for its demonstration of the central place of flowers as a decorative theme during the Victorian era where they were used extensively in both sewing and gardening.

f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

g. Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.

h. Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

## **Extent of Registration**

The object known as the Marianne Gibson crazy quilt held by the Wangaratta Historical Society, registration number 71.

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*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*